

The Latest Adventures of the Wonderful Cleek ::

By T. W. HANSHEW

DOLLOPS hung up the receiver, swept an uncompleted missive to Miss Gumbard into his pocket and hurried off to his den there, a half minute later, to find Cleek so deeply engrossed in a six months' old copy of a Chinese periodical that he did not hear him until he was actually in the room.

"Well, my beloved Mercury, what important message from Jove have you flown in to deliver?" said Cleek with a laugh, as he looked up to find him at his elbow. "You look as if you had a shock from the way you are staring, old chap."

"My word, sir, so I have!" replied Dollops, with a look of amazement and awe. "You don't mean to say, do you, sir, that it's a newspaper—like the rest?"

"Oh, yes," replied Cleek, with a kindly smile. "It's a newspaper, my lad, and a very interesting one at that. Only you read it downward instead of crossways, as you do other newspapers. Here, for instance, look at this line. Here is the account of a great art sale, and here, in this line, the report of a daring robbery and the theft of a thing more valuable than life itself to the members of the great house of the Ming dynasty, and the subsequent arrest and decapitation of the robber, one Li Ah Swong, whose body was afterward dismembered and thrown to the swine by order of the emperor himself. But tell me something: Didn't I hear the telephone ring a few moments ago?"

"Yes, sir—he did ring up; that was his call you heard, gov'ner. He told me to tell you that there was nothing extra special on the cards for today, and that you were free to nip off to Sussex and see all them wonderful lasses full of wild roses you was a-speakin' of wanting to get a peep at, sir, if only you'd send him word where a messenger could find you in case anything did turn up later. Wot am I to tell him, sir?"

"Tell him?" Cleek was on his feet instantly, his paper thrown aside, his whole face alight, all things but those rose-filled Sussex lanes banished from his mind, and the enthusiasm of the horn nature lover swaying him entirely. "Tell him the Rising Sun inn over on the other side of Horsted Keynes," he said. "Cut along and deliver the message at once, and then—stop a moment, you flyaway young monkey—then get your tramping boots and your Norfolk suit, my lad, and we will be off together for a day in the woods and the fields, with the brooks and the trees and the birds and the flowers and the glories of the world just as God made it, old chap. Off with you now while I look up a train. That's all. Cut along."

The boy "cut along" forthwith and the message was dispatched to Mr. Narkom, the change in his apparel made, and he at the foot of the stairs a good five minutes before Cleek himself was ready.

"Bravo! Beat me at my own game, have you, you young beggar?" he laughed when he descended and found him there. "Now, then, nip out and hail a taxi while I look up there's a train leaving Kensington at ten—then and we've simply got to catch it, my lad."

They did and were at Horsted Keynes at twelve-thirty to the tick. Striking out at once into the pleasant country lands beyond, they walked to such good purpose that one o'clock found them wandering through leafy lanes and skirting bird-haunted woods on their way to the crossroads where the Rising Sun is located.

And that was how it came to pass that when, at ten minutes past two, the Rev. Mr. Mollison, curate of St. Eldred's, came driving up in the vicar's ancient trap to seek them, he found them there, appearing the demands of healthy appetites at a most unwholesome table of food.

"My dear Mr. Cleek, allow me to introduce myself," he said as he pushed open the door and walked in upon them. "I am the curate of St. Eldred's and my name is Mollison. You wonder, perhaps, why I have intruded and how I know you when we have never met before?"

"Well, the latter circumstance is a trifle bewildering, Mr. Mollison, I must admit. I was not aware that your countenance was so familiar to the world at large."

"Oh, it is not that—it is not at all that. I should not have gained the slightest hint to your identity had you been alone. But Mr. Narkom told me that you would be here and that you would have a companion—a young man with very long legs, very red hair and an extremely large quantity of freckles."

"Well, blow his blessed cheek!" blurted out Dollops indignantly. "Oo! he chuckin' mud at when it comes to looks—a moon-faced sossidie like 'im?"

Here Cleek's hand touched his sleeve and silenced him, and Cleek's voice interposed.

"Mr. Narkom?" he repeated, with a sigh of patient resignation and an inquiring look.

"My dear sir, you are in error. It is not Mr. Narkom who wants you; it is I, I, my dear Mr. Cleek—in the interest of a most unhappy woman who is so circumstanced that she cannot pay a farthing for your services. I mentioned that fact to Mr. Narkom when I called him up over the telephone and asked him if, out of sheer humanity he could not send some one here to investigate a baffling and most heart-rending mystery and so save a distracted wife from going out of her senses, and after I had told the facts of the case—But need I proceed, sir? Is not the fact that I am here sufficient proof of what he told me, Mr. Cleek?"

"I am at your service, Mr. Mollison. Now sit down, please, and tell me all about the case."

"It begins with the disappearance—the utter and complete vanishment—of a man within sight of his own

house when returning after a two years' absence to the wife he loved and the child he had never seen, and from that point it passes on to a mysterious visitant who, unseen and unknown, commits wanton and cruel depredations in the neighborhood, without other aim or purpose so far as any human intellect can fathom, than the torture and persecution of the vanished man's family and connections. At one time visiting the humble home of his poor old mother and ruthlessly slaying the poultry by which she gains her living, and slaying it not to satisfy hunger or for any justifiable reason, Mr. Cleek, but from sheer, wanton cruelty and spitefulness, for they all were hacked open, dismembered and their mangled bodies left lying on the ground, and at another time traveling a distance of more than a mile for the malicious purpose of visiting the home of the vanished man himself, committing other depredations there and leaving brilliant little stone cubes painted a brilliant scarlet and wrapped up in fragments of cloth which the distracted wife is able to identify as being cut from the clothing of her missing husband."

"H'm, I see. A peculiar case and—interesting. Suppose you begin at the beginning, Mr. Mollison, and tell me all about it."

"Well, to speak the truth, Mr. Cleek, there is very little more than you have heard to tell save that the man's name is David Lasswade, he is about thirty years of age and up to the time of his marriage, three years ago this coming September, he lived when not at sea, with his aged mother, whose sole surviving son he was, her other having died and left her with an orphan son of his own, a boy of about nine years old and named, like his father, Owen. As I have said, three years ago this coming September, this David was married to a girl he had long loved, one Maggie Empley, an orphan who owned a little cottage and an acre or so of ground about a mile distant from his mother's modest little establishment. Maggie had never liked the idea of his calling; had, indeed, always hated the sea and the dangers of it, and after marriage this hatred so grew that she instilled a little of it into him, and he finally promised that he would make his next voyage his last one and would do his best to get something to do ashore in future—though Heaven knows what it would be or how they would get along."

"However, David gave his promise and sailed away on that last long voyage (which was to last upward of fifteen months and ended in keeping them apart for twenty-four, as you shall presently hear, Mr. Cleek) and in these he told her that he was saving all his money so as to have something to set himself up with when he came back; and she, on her part, wrote and told him when their little son was born and what a bonny little chap he was, and spoke lovingly of how happy times they all would have when daddy came back to them both never to go away again. Well, things went on in that way for a long time, Mr. Cleek; then all of a sudden came the news of the utter loss of the Albatross, David's ship, off the Chinese coast, and for months after that she heard no word from nor of him and didn't know if she was a widow or not. Then a letter came to her to tell her that he was living and to explain to her the reason for his long silence. Not only had he lost all his kit and all his savings in the wreck, but he had been so badly injured on the head that his brain was affected and he had been out of his mind for many many months, and the doctors had hesitated to operate until his bodily strength was sufficient to warrant it. Now they had operated and he was coming on all right, and hoped in a month or so to be discharged from the hospital and to be up and about looking for a ship in which he could find a berth to work his way back to England and her."

"It is now over six months since that letter was written, Mr. Cleek, and it was the last she heard from him until Thursday of a week ago. In the meantime, all her new-found joy was scattered to the winds by having the letter which she had written in reply to his returned from the hospital in China with word that the patient had long since been discharged as cured and had gone but she did not know where, and she was all but insane with grief and terror when that other letter which I have spoken of—the letter of last Thursday week—arrived and sent her nearly daft with joy. As well it might, Mr. Cleek, for it was written and posted in England, and in it he told her that not only was he in his native land again, but luck had turned for him and he had found something that would set them up in the world for good and that they wouldn't ever have to worry or to be parted again as long as we live, was the way he phrased it—and ending by telling her to keep a close watch out for him as he would surely be home that evening and he hoped she'd have a steak-and-kidney pudding for supper, for she knew how fond he was of it and he hadn't tasted one since the day he left her, eight two years ago."

"You may guess what followed the receipt of that letter, Mr. Cleek. She flew with the news to his mother, she sent his little nephew, Owen, down into the village to get the meat and the kidney for that pudding, but the man never came to eat it. That was the last she ever heard from him. He vanished from that moment, and beyond the declaration of little Owen that, as he went on his errand, he saw and spoke to his uncle, the man was on his way home across the fields, no living being has ever heard from or of him since."

"H'm! Very interesting, very, Mr. Mollison," said Cleek, puckering up his forehead and stroking his chin. "When did that fowl-killing performance begin, may I ask? Immediately following the man's vanishment or some little time later?"

"Almost immediately, Mr. Cleek."

THE SCARLET CUBES

When Mrs. Lasswade ran over to his mother's place to show her the letter and to tell her the news, naturally the old lady was so excited she did not know whether she was standing on her head or her feet, and nothing would do her but that she must go back with her daughter-in-law and there to greet David when he arrived. That was before sunset, Mr. Cleek. Her little flock of ducks, fowls and geese was still wandering about the inclosure where she keeps it and she was so excited she forgot to drive them into their roosting quarters and pen them up for the night; in fact, she never even thought of them until she returned, broken hearted, at twelve o'clock at night. When she did think of them and went out to pen them up she found fourteen ducks, three hens and nine geese lying dead on the

ground and set hard like stone. But, contrary to Cleek's expectations, it was not scarlet by any means. Instead, it was of a peculiar drabish-fawn color, with not so much as a hint of red about it.

"But I thought you told me the cubes were scarlet," began Cleek, glancing up as the thing dropped on to his palm, and he had need to say no more, for Mr. Mollison, too, had remarked the color of it and was staring at it and scratching his ear perplexedly.

"God bless my soul! What a strange, what an amazing, transformation!" he bleated helplessly.

"Oh, but there are others—there are several others, Mr. Cleek. Mrs. Lasswade has eight or nine of them in the inclosure for the fowls, and the close proximity of the dark, thick-growing, gloomy-looking woods. 'Stop a min-

ute, please—let's have a look at it.' And then, scarcely waiting for the horse to answer to the reins and come to a standstill, he put his hand on the side of the vehicle, vaulted over the wheel and was out in the road in a twinkling.

After plunging into the woods and remaining invisible for the fraction of a minute, Cleek emerged suddenly in a calmer mood and, striking out over the marshy ground at a walking pace, returned to the trap and climbed back into it at once.

"A very interesting old place that, Mr. Mollison, and instructive," he said, as he struck a match and lit a cigarette. "Our friend, the duck-killer, has altered his tactics, because he will wish those unfortunate birds yet if the old lady doesn't take them indoors."

"Dear me! You don't mean to say, sir, that you think he contemplates returning to make a raid upon them again?"

"He has returned and made raids upon them a good many times since that first visit, Mr. Mollison, I assure you."

"But, my dear Mr. Cleek, surely you are mistaken—surely you are. I can positively affirm that the solitary bird has been butchered since that first night."

"To be sure. He has gone off the 'butchery' track now and he is starving them to death. Old Mrs. Lasswade feeds them of mashed potato mixed with cornmeal, and they don't get the third of it. The beggar's hungry and he's stealing their food. Also, he is desperate and he is inventive. Desperate, because he ventures out on his raids in the daylight, now—in the early morning when the birds are fed; and inventive because he steals the food with a sort of scoop net made out of old wire netting lined with a yellow-spotted, red cotton handkerchief, and fastened by a leather bootlace to the bent branch of a chestnut tree."

"My dear Mr. Cleek! Why, how in the name of all that is miraculous—'Nothing miraculous about it, Mr. Mollison,' interposed Cleek. 'Now drive on if you please, for I am deeply interested in meeting David Lasswade's wife just as soon as it is possible to do so.'"

"It was possible to do so inside of the next fifteen minutes as he found, when



"Oh, please speak—do!" the woman implored.

ground and literally hacked to pieces."

"I see! Pretty rough that on the old lady. Lose any more in the same way since?"

"No. Not one, fortunately, for it would have ruined her completely if she had. It was all over and done with that first night."

"H'm! Just so. Then that would argue that the—er—butcher, whoever he may be, got what he wanted and had no reason to return."

"Got what he—God bless my soul, Mr. Cleek, you surely don't imagine—"

"Imagination is my great weakness, Mr. Mollison. Don't attach any importance to my mental wanderings. Let us shelve the assassinated ducks, if you please and return to our muttons—or, rather, to our scarlet cubes. Did they, too, begin to present themselves to notice on that first night? Or did they make their initial appearance at some time later?"

"Oh, later, Mr. Cleek—two nights later, in fact. Poor David's wife does not know at what exact period they were placed there, but she found them on the back doorstep when she got up in the morning."

"Tell me about them if you can. I am deeply interested. You have seen some of them, no doubt?"

"More than seen, Mr. Cleek. I have one of them on my person at this moment. It belongs to the first set poor Mrs. Lasswade received. I have carried it in my pocket ever since. Here it is if you would like to examine it, sir."

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for a moment or two, then drew out between his thumb and forefinger the cube in question and laid it upon Cleek's outstretched palm.

It was a curious little thing of about an inch square, heavy for its size, and apparently made of some mortar-like substance which had been poured into a mold and, on drying,

and your companion over to her residence."

"I shall be delighted, Mr. Mollison, for to tell you the truth these cubes interest me more than ever now that I have seen this sample of them. I suppose you are aware of the fact that this is one of those little sections belonging to a toy known as a child's box of building bricks, Mr. Mollison?"

Those little wedges and cubes and rectangles made of cement and intended to amuse as well as to instruct the human small fry in the art of erecting arches, temples and houses in accordance to accompanying designs, and to be purchased at any toy shop at prices ranging from six pence to a guinea a box. Take it and look at it. Now that the scarlet paint is removed, its true character is perfectly obvious, my dear sir."

"God bless my soul! why, so it is! A toy building brick and nothing more. And now that you bring the matter to my attention, Mr. Cleek, I recall the fact that several such boxes were distributed to the children of the parish from our church tree at our last Christmas celebration, sir, and I believe—indeed, I may say I am sure—that one of them fell to the lot of poor David Lasswade's little son. Oh—becoming excited suddenly—"I recall more than that, now! I recall the fact that his mother told me she set him out on the back doorstep with his toys to amuse himself while she and his grandmother set about making that steak-and-kidney pudding, Mr. Cleek, and, as he fell asleep there and she carried him up and put him to bed, it is quite possible that the toys were left there and under the stress and sorrow of after events were entirely forgotten."

"Very likely," agreed Cleek. "In which case it will be fair to suppose that the nocturnal visitant found them there and carried them off for the purpose they have since been put to. I think we shall make no grave error, Mr. Mollison, if we conclude that the cubes which have so terrified David Lasswade's wife were supplied by her infant son, which afterward was found to be correct—that when we come to look more closely into the matter we shall

find that other trifles—a wooden soldier, a toy lamb, something of that sort—was taken; and when a thief in the night came down to the point of stealing a baby's toys—H'm, yes, to be sure."

"To be sure," Mr. Cleek? To be sure of what?"

"That it is about time we started to have a look at those scarlet cubes which still remain scarlet, Mr. Mollison," he replied, as he pushed back his chair and rose.

"That's the elder Mrs. Lasswade's house," said the curate, pointing with his whip.

"Oh, is it?" said Cleek, looking over at it with extreme interest. His quick eye taking in the pond and the squashed state of the earth, due to the underground spring which fed it, the low wall of the kitchen garden, the wire netting of the inclosure for the fowls, and the close proximity of the dark, thick-growing, gloomy-looking woods. "Stop a min-

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"It was possible to do so inside of the next fifteen minutes as he found, when

the trap halted at another lonely house standing a mile distant from the one they had just left."

She was a buxom woman this Maggie Lasswade, and despite the fact that her eyes were red with weeping and her countenance had a dreary expression, born of her present unhappy position, Cleek decided that David Lasswade was a lucky chap to have won her.

"Ah, sir, it's good and kind of you to do so, and I hope God will bless you for it," she said gratefully, when Mr. Mollison explained. "If you can trace him, sir, if by God's help you can find him and bring him back to me, I'll think I can, my poor girl. Indeed, I may say I am sure I can," said Cleek. "And it wouldn't surprise me if, considering what sort of a fellow he is, he were able to do so this very afternoon."

"Oh, sir! Oh, sir!" she broke out with a little gust of happy tears. "If only I could see him again! There'd be peace and plenty, too, and we'd never have to worry over money troubles any more. For luck's come our way at last, bless God, and I could sell the house at the fine profit the foreign gentleman has made, and we could have another and money in the bank as well."

"Foreign gentleman?" repeated Cleek, looking around the place and wondering what sort of a fellow a gentleman it could be who was anxious to live on a dreary waste and in a cheap little house like this; and, what was more, pay a fancy price for that doubtful privilege of being able to see you please, Mrs. Lasswade. What sort of a foreign gentleman—French, German, Italian, or what?"

"I don't know for certain, sir, but from the appearance of him and his brother I should think they were either Japs or Chinese."

"Did they give you any reason for wanting to buy?"

"Yes, sir. The elder said that his brother was ill and wanted to be where it was quiet and had taken a fancy to the place and he was willing to pay a good price for it. But I wouldn't sell, sir—I wouldn't dream of selling until Dave came back. He'd never know where to find me, perhaps, if I went from the old place. But they won't take no for an answer, those foreign gentlemen. They came first on the day after Dave disappeared and they've kept on coming every day since and offering me more and more money each time."

"Well, I'm blessed. But for the present I have other fish to fry. I am extremely interested in seeing one of those scarlet cubes, which Mr. Mollison tells me you received so mysteriously, and if you have one handy—"

"I have them all!" she interjected, turning to a tin box standing on the table and emptying its contents out before him. "Look! See! Here they are, sir. Eight of them have come, sir—one for every day since my Dave disappeared."

"The instant they rolled out on the little table and lay before him glowing with a coating of red so vivid that it put all other reds to shame in contrast, a curious excitement came upon Cleek and he almost sprang at the things in his eagerness to get hold of one."

"By Jupiter, vermillion—genuine Chinese vermillion!" he exclaimed as he bore it to the light and examined the thick coating of paint smeared over the surface of it. "The real stuff! The Simon pure Fung Loo Chang vermillion. And then he stopped and flung back his head with the twitching emphatic movement Dollops knew and understood so well and rapped out a short staccato laugh.

"Gov'ner!" he exclaimed, the excited boy. "Gov'ner, you—yourself found it out, sir? You know?"

"Yes," he gave back. "I know! Lend me your horse and trap, Mr. Mollison. Stop here—all of us—half an hour for me and you all shall know—why the man vanished, why the ducks were killed, why the cubes were scarlet—everything!"

Then he screwed round on his heel and rushed out of the house, jumped into the waiting trap, and as the curate and Mrs. Lasswade ran to the door and looked after him he was driving off over the road in the direction of that lonely house as fast as the horse could fly.

Upon reaching that lonely house he jumped out of the trap, raced across the marshy land and past the low wall to the borders of the wood beyond, and plunging into the gloom and stillness of that, forged through the tangles of vines and undergrowth and pressed onward, crying aloud: "Lasswade, come out! It—come out of it, you monkey jacks! I know about the berry! And why the ducks were killed, and I'm a friend. Come out of it, man; come out. The chinks are here; but I'll show you how to make a comfortable little fortune out of them for Maggie and the child if you will only come out and show yourself like a man, instead of clinging to a thing that may be the death of you and hiding away somewhere in a cupboard."

It was 4 o'clock when Cleek returned and walked back into the little room where they still waited, bringing with him the cheeriest of news.

"Oh, please speak—do!" the woman implored, reaching out her hands to him as he entered.

"I have found out everything, Mrs. Lasswade," he replied, "and you are going to be the happiest woman in England before this day is over. There, there, my dear, don't get so excited, your mother's waiting for you, and as you cannot possibly go to him until evening, it is cut and dried here and quite safe for the man to show his face in the neighborhood, the more you delay, the longer that happy period will be deferred. Now, then, we will get to business. We shan't have any too much time, for I fancy I caught sight of your two Chinese visitors coming across the waste as I drove back and we must have everything ready for them when they arrive."

"You are going to sell this house and everything in it to them for the sum of £1,000 cash down, Mr. Lasswade, and if they haven't that much money with them—which I am pretty sure they have—you've got to give them time to nip off and get it to close the bargain and to enter into possession at once. Oh, no, you mustn't hope to remove a single article. They expect to get everything in it, including this, Mrs. Lasswade," opening his hand and exposing to view a flashing stone of a greenish blue and about the size of a thrush's egg—and to be certain that they do get it, let us drop it in this little box here, which once held the scarlet cubes. Not a very fitting casket for so choice a gem, to be sure, but as it is reposed for some five or six hours in the interior of a duck, it is used to strange resting places of late. What is that, Mr. Mollison? Yes, it is a precious stone—one of the seven most precious stones in all the world, to be precise; for there is engraved upon it a thing useless and unintelligible by itself, but when joined to that which is engraved in part upon each of the six

others that go to make up the set, records a secret which was old and was still a secret when the dawn of Christianity was begun."

"Among the arts and crafts of the world, Mr. Mollison, two-born in the East, both of them—have defied all the efforts of Western civilization to master, and their secret remains a secret still to all lands but those of their origin. One of those arts is the Turkish secret of laying gold upon steel; the other is the manufacture of Chinese vermillion. For thousands of years the secret of vermillion, engraved upon the surface of seven green berries, has been handed down from father to son in the great house of Fung Loo Chang, and I was not aware until I read an account this morning in an old Chinese paper that any eve but one belonging to that race had ever looked upon those sacred and jealously-guarded berries. In that paper, however, I read that a treacherous offshoot of the race—one Li Ah Swong—probing the secret of their whereabouts, had got at them, stolen them, and run off with them—only, however, to be caught and hanged for a traitor to his race, and a violent death for his treachery. But, according to the report, when the berries, which were recovered from him after he was taken, were put in a box and taken to his repository, came to be counted it was discovered that one was missing."

"Shall I tell you what became of it, my friend? An English sailor, recently discharged from a hospital, was unable to read or write, picked up a stone in a field within a foot or two of the spot where Li Ah Swong was caught and strangled, and with it a tube of vermillion, and put the lot in his pocket, not knowing its value nor that the natives whose tongue he did not understand, paid by the owners of it, were inquiring for it everywhere. That was David Lasswade! It was within an hour of his sailing that he learned the slightest thing regarding the value of the stone he had picked up five or six nights before. The knowledge came to him then by inadvertently producing the stone in the presence of a fellow-seaman—an Usonian—who had signed on for the same ship with him, and the instant the man saw it he recognized it, told him its history, the immense value, the vast reward that could be got for it if caught, were used, the certainty of a violent death if it were found upon him, and instantly laid claim to a half share in it, under penalty of betraying its finder to the Chinese. The ship sailed, and Lasswade did refuse. Like the silly fellow he was, he believed that once on English soil he need not fear assassins, whereas, Chinese or not, and that he could then turn the stone over to a price to some one who would attend to the matter of negotiating for the return of it to the house of Fung Loo Chang and so carry a nice little sum home to his wife and child. The ship sailed, and the Usonian was left, but that night he dropped over the side and swam ashore and betrayed his mate, as he had said he would, for the sake of the reward his treachery brought him. Evidently the cable came into play and agents in England of the Fung Loo Chang were set on the watch for Lasswade, for when the poor chap was seen, he was seized and hired a man in a public house to deliver that letter to his wife, telling her that he was on his way home to her with something valuable which he had picked up, he had become aware that the Chinese were after him and that his position was one of danger."

"In a panic, he got away from the place, eluding them adroitly, and started on his way home, believing that he had slipped the net, and that he would be safe when he was coming across the fields near his mother's house—where he met and spoke to the boy Owen—that he was undecided. For of a sudden, after the boy had passed on, he saw a light in the window of his mother's house, and he was within fifty yards of his mother's house. Two Chinamen started up from behind a knoll on the waste and made toward him. Whether they meant violence or their object was to deal with him for the return of the stone we shall never know; but to him their appearance here, all unguarded when he might as well have known that they were there, was a panic he turned tail and ran with the speed he was capable of. One thought alone was in his mind; that, come what might, they shouldn't get the stone even if they caught him, and that he would hope that his mother might find it, and he passed that fowl inclosure, he took the berry from his pocket and cast it over the wall, dimly conscious of all the fowls rushing to a spot to feed."

"Well, the Chinese didn't catch him, Mr. Mollison. He got into the woods and made for a sort of cave he'd dug out there when he was a boy, and they never discovered his hiding place from that hour to this. They missed him and after a time, when it became dark and he thought of the berry lying out there in the fowl yard, all unguarded when he might as well have known that they were there, he was safe in the woods with him he crept out and went back to get it, he couldn't find a trace of it anywhere, and it was not until he remembered that wild scamper of the fowls when he got it into their midst that an idea of what might possibly have become of it entered his mind, and set him running amuck, as it were, among the unfortunate birds. As I surmised, he flew at the first bird he killed three of them before he remembered that they were less likely to have snapped up the stone and swallowed it than were the ducks and geese, and he went slaying and dismembering them right and left until he came upon the one in whose crop the stone lay, and his bloodthirsty search was ended."

"The rest is very soon told, for you can imagine that from that hour he dwelt in his cave retreat in the woods and life was a life of mental torture. He dared not risk visiting his wife or his mother, for fear of letting them get a hint that the women of both houses were related to him and possibly revenging themselves upon him by some savage act toward them, yet he ached to let them know that he was alive and safe, and could not because he was unable to write a word to convey the intelligence to them. It was in this dilemma that he hit upon the idea of the scarlet cubes, in a sneaking pilgrimage to his own house under cover of the night, he had seen those little building bricks lying on the doorstep just where the child had left them, and they put the idea into his head. In the belief that, with the Chinese in the neighborhood, the story of the berry must surely have got out and perhaps (doing it into the hands of his wife, he smeared the cubes with the vermillion as a sign that he still had the stone, and he added cuts from his clothing that she might know it was he who placed the things where she found them, and it never for a moment occurred to him that in doing this he was giving her any cause for alarm or that—Hello! The door knocker, by Jove! It is the Chinese calling again to bid for the house. Remember, Mrs. Lasswade, £1,000 and cash down before you let them cross the threshold. Good luck to you, little woman, and all the happiness the world. Come along, Dollops, old chap. Back door, my lad—step lively! I'm anxious to see those wild roses before the sun goes down."